DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 478 081 IR 058 675

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TITLE	Competencies for the 21st Century Information Professional: Translating the SLA Competencies into Business Competencies.
PUB DATE	2002-06-00
NOTE	12p.; In: SLA 2002: Putting Knowledge to Work. Papers Presented at the Special Libraries Association Conference (Los Angeles, California, June 9-12, 2002); see IR 058 674.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.sla.org/content/Events/conference/2002annual/ confpap2002/papers2002conf.cfm/ .
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Business; *Competence ; *Job Skills; *Librarians; Library Associations; Library Services; Models; Professional Development; *Self Evaluation (Individuals); *Special Libraries; Standards
IDENTIFIERS	Special Libraries Association

ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the Special Libraries Association competencies can be mapped to the broader business competencies of marketing (promoting), packaging (product development), persuading and performing (sales/customer service), and positioning (strategic maneuvering). It introduces a process whereby the skills, knowledge, understandings, and attitudes associated with each competency are identified and matched with the skills required in a business environment. Having matched the skills, knowledge, understandings, and attitudes and mapped the competencies, the author introduces a model for self-evaluation that enables individuals to assess their strengths and weaknesses and identify any skills gap that exists. The assessment can then be used to develop study programs, to support requests for professional development and to supplement performance reviews. If shared, the assessments can also be used to establish teams with an appropriate balance of skills and experience. Charts for matching personal and professional competencies, professional librarian competencies with business competencies, the components of a librarian competency with the business competencies, and the components of a librarian competency with the components of a business competency are appended. (Contains 12 references.) (MES)

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ED 478 081

Competencies for the 21st Century Information Professional

Translating the SLA Competencies into Business Competencies

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INTRODUCTION

What makes an information professional competent in the current global move towards establishing knowledge-based economies? SLA has defined a set of professional and personal competencies that encompass the diverse range of tasks expected of information professionals today. Those of us working in the field know all too well that many of those competencies extend way beyond what we learned in library school - we have become marketers, sellers, packagers, negotiators and politicians in our drive to provide the information and knowledge services needed by our clients and our organizations.

This paper examines how the SLA competencies can be mapped to the broader business competencies of marketing (promoting), packaging (product development), persuading and performing (sales/customer service) and positioning (strategic manoeuvring). It introduces a process whereby the skills, knowledge, understandings and attitudes associated with each competency are identified and matched with the skills required in a business environment.

Having matched the skills, knowledge, understandings and attitudes and mapped the competencies, the author introduces a model for self-evaluation that enables individuals to assess their strengths and weaknesses and identify any skills gap that exists. The assessment can then be used to develop study programs, to support requests for professional development and to supplement performance reviews. If shared, the assessments can also be used to establish teams with an appropriate balance of skills and experience.

THE SLA COMPETENCIES

'Competencies are a combination of skills, knowledge, and behaviours important for organizational success, personal performance and career development. Professional competencies relate to the special librarian's knowledge in the areas of information resources, information access, technology, management, and research, as well as the ability to use these areas of knowledge as a basis for providing library and information services. Personal competencies represent a set of skills, attitudes and values that enable librarians to work efficiently; be good communicators; focus on continuing learning throughout their careers; demonstrate the value-added nature of their contributions; and survive in the new world of work'. [Special Libraries Association, 1997 p.ix]

The 1990s have seen a global move towards competency-based education and assessment for library students in library schools. Competency-based assessment has extended into the

IR058675

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workplace for many information professionals as it enables an organization to evaluate the capabilities and performance of its employees in a measurable and consistent manner that facilitates performance review, staff management and succession planning methodologies. This has resulted in an unprecedented demand for professional development programs both in the workplace and through professional associations. These programs enable individuals to increase their competency levels in areas where gaps have been identified, or where higher levels of competency need to be achieved for promotion, job enhancement or career development.

Since the publication of the SLA competencies in 1997 many other sets of competencies have been developed with the objective of providing the elements of measurability, comparability and consistency to the performance of workers in the library sector. A search on the WWW will find competencies for librarians serving children in public libraries, reference librarians, teacher-librarians, research librarians, law librarians, information searching and retrieval and library instruction to name just a few.

Despite this increasing emphasis on competency, very little work has been done on further evaluation of the skills, knowledge, attitudes and understanding that comprise each competency and how those components relate to an organization in a business sense. It seems very important in this time of focus on the 'bottom-line' and ROI (return on investment) by organizations that information professionals take the time to examine their competencies and to translate them into the language of the business sector. It is also important to understand how the competencies that an individual has can be used to position, package, promote, persuade and perform to demonstrate how they contribute to the objectives of their organization.

BUSINESS COMPETENCIES

To become an integral part of an organization the information professional must provide a significant contribution to the business from the perspective of the organization (management and the broader client base). For this contribution to be recognized and acknowledged you must:

- Speak a language that they understand
- Know the business of the organization (ie. the wider industry)
- Know how the organization works
- Know where your services are needed and can add value
- Know which products and services are needed and how they should be delivered
- Know how to market and sell your products and services
- Know how to consistently deliver and exceed expectations

The professional and personal librarianship competencies can be aligned with the business environment by focusing on the five key issues of (1) Strategic Positioning, (2) Packaging, (3) Promoting, (4) Persuading, and (5) Performing.

Strategic Positioning

This requires a clear understanding of why you are doing your job, what your responsibility is to your organization, who comprises your client base and how you can help them do their jobs better -- from their perspective rather than yours. You must know:

1. Why your organization exists, how it works and what your roles and responsibilities are within the organizational context.
2. Who your clients are and what business solutions you provide for them -- how you can help them do their jobs better / faster / cheaper / more effectively.
3. Who/what your competitors are and what makes you and your services better -- what your 'uniqueness' is.

Packaging

How you package your information product and yourself as the deliverer of the product must be based on the needs of the client and his/her perception of his/her information needs. Create an identity for your products, services and self. Describe the problem/s that you have the solution/s for and then describe your solution/s. Develop a statement of why you are best qualified to provide the solution/s and communicate it in a variety of ways (face-to-face, print, electronic etc.).

Promoting

How you promote your products and services to remain in the forefront of the minds of existing clients and to attract new clients can depend on your ability to target, perform, communicate and network. There are six core promotional strategies-

1. *Referral* - build on the network of those you already know. Referrals come from satisfied clients and those who know you through your reputation and the message you communicate through your marketing.
2. *Network* - gain visibility and credibility. Networking is a powerful way to be seen, get known and build trust amongst those who might use your service or refer you to others who need what you have to offer.
3. *Writing* - gain credibility by communicating your expertise to your organization and industry sector. Writing articles is a powerful way to build credibility and visibility. Your aim is to educate your prospective clients about your ability to apply what you know to their situation.
4. *Speaking* - stand out as an expert on industry-specific information issues. Speaking engagements are a powerful way to gain immediate credibility and can attract clients immediately.
5. *Direct approach* - approach prospective clients directly.
6. *Keep-in-touch* - stay in touch with clients so they don't forget you when they need your services. (Middleton, 2000)

Persuading

Persuasion is the one-to-one part of the marketing process that is happening anytime you are communicating about your services. It is the process of discovering if there is a match between the prospective client needs and what you have to offer. It is a conversation to determine how you can help your prospects attain their goals.

Performing

Performance is in the eye of the beholder - understand your clients' expectations and then exceed them. To do this effectively client needs and expectations must be explicit rather than implicit.

ANALYSING THE COMPETENCIES

Each librarian and business competency consists of a mix of skills, knowledge, understanding, and attitudes. The significance of each of these components varies from competency to competency and according to how the competency is applied in a specific workplace. It is the sum of all of these components that determines an individual's level of competence and how appropriate that competency level is to an organization.

For example, when analysing professional competency #1 - *Expert knowledge of the content of information resources, including the ability to critically evaluate and filter them*, the *knowledge* required for competency includes: products and their content (including format-specific characteristics), client needs and information use behaviours (preferred methods of access etc.), organizational objectives (to enable prioritisation) and the technical infrastructure available for information delivery.

The many *skills* associated with this competency include: information extraction (regardless of format), product evaluation, client needs evaluation, communication, and negotiation (with clients and vendors).

The *understandings* that must be present include: a diverse range of products can deliver similar information, client needs and information use behaviours rarely remain static (and personal preferences can often overrule organizational needs), comprehensive product evaluation can assist prioritization for delivery and budgetary purposes, and that price and delivery and access options are part of the evaluation process.

Attitudes that impact on this competency include: flexibility (to accept that there is often not a 'best' product), that quality is subjective and that our views should often not be forced onto the information users, that our evaluation and filtering can make a significant contribution to people's work, and that when dealing with vendors *we* are the customers and that when dealing with clients *they* are the customers.

By identifying the components of the competency we are able to better see the specific areas where we might need further training and/or development. We are also better able to map the components to the business competencies.

MAPPING THE COMPETENCIES

Once the components of the professional and personal librarian competencies have been identified for a specific environment, they can then be mapped to the business competencies. By crossing the interconnecting cells the relationships between the two sets of competencies can be visually represented (Appendix II).

Identifying the components that comprise the business competencies and then identifying relationships between the components of the competencies (Appendix III) can further enhance this process.

As the relationships vary according to a specific role, a rating system can be used to identify the strength of a relationship. The resulting representation will show a hierarchy of relationships to facilitate the prioritisation of developmental activities.

MODEL FOR SELF-EVALUATION

Once the mapping process has been completed, an individual can then conduct a self-evaluation that facilitates the identification of strengths, weaknesses and gaps. The results of this analysis can then be used to feed into performance reviews and professional development proposals. Individuals are asked to rate their own levels of competency using the following scale of 1 to 5:

5 - I excel at this - it is one of my strengths.
4 - My level of knowledge or ability is adequate, but I wish to excel.
3 - My level of knowledge or ability is adequate in meeting this.
2 - I recognize that I need to improve in this.
1 - I have little or no training towards this, and need it.

The outcomes of the self-evaluation can then be matched against the competency relationships to identify how well an individual's competency level matches that required by an organization. The matching process can also be used to identify the areas where improvements are necessary and to develop a plan for action.

DEVELOPING AN ACTION PLAN

A formal action plan can be developed using the results of the mapping and self-evaluation processes. The plan can be used to identify the actions needed to address shortfalls in both personal and professional competencies. The plan must include the name of the competency, how the competency will be acquired or improved, specific and measurable goals (based on skills, knowledge, understandings or attitudes to be acquired), details of what the process involves (training, mentoring, etc), what will be done by whom and how, how much it will cost and how long it will take.

AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND COMPETENCY WORKSHOPS

Many information professionals in the Australian library sector are being forced to evaluate their levels of competency in relation to competencies developed by the business sector and to articulate them in the language of the business sector. To facilitate this process, the Dialog Corporation agreed in 2001 to sponsor the development and delivery of a series of workshops across Australia and New Zealand. The workshops began in Melbourne in September 2001 and are scheduled to run through 2002 in Sydney, Canberra, Brisbane, Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington. Although targeted at special librarians, participants have also included information professionals from academic libraries.

The outcomes of the workshops vary from individual to individual but some general findings have been:

1) all professional competencies have an underlying dependence on personal competencies
2) skills gap analysis (for training and development purposes) must be done at the component level rather than the competency level
3) there is a close correlation between the librarian competencies and the business competencies at the component level
4) the weighting of the components that comprise each competency can vary significantly according to the workplace and the role and responsibilities of the individual
5) adopting the 'language' of the business world can be a significant step towards strategically positioning an information service and raising the profile of an individual
6) once developed, the business competencies can form the basis for position descriptions, performance reviews, personal and professional development programs, training and study programs and team development

As insufficient time is available in the workplace to reflect on many of the issues related to competencies, the workshops provide individuals with the opportunity to step back from their day-to-day responsibilities and take time out to reflect on their positions and roles within their organizations. Most participants were grateful for the opportunity to develop a clearer focus and an action plan for their own future development.

CONCLUSION

For the contribution that special librarians make towards their organizations' success to be recognized and acknowledged it is necessary for the librarian to be regarded as an integral part of an organization. A move towards gaining such a strategic position can be made by approaching the packaging and delivery of information and the promotion of information and knowledge services and products in a way that uses the competencies of the business sector rather than those of librarians. This does not mean adopting new competencies by which to measure ourselves, but rather to map our librarian competencies to a set of accepted business competencies and to articulate how we measure our competency levels in the language of our organizations. This paper has used the SLA competencies, however the process described can be used with any of the sets of competencies that have been developed for specific library purposes or by specific library groups (see examples in the reference list). By describing our competencies in the language of our organizations and by taking responsibility for the development of our own levels of competency in such areas as strategic positioning, packaging, promoting, persuading and performing we are more likely to be accepted as a significant member of the organizational team and acknowledged as being an essential contributor to an organization's success.

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APPENDIX I

MATCHING PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES

Professional Competencies \ Personal Competencies	Committed to service excellence	Seeks out new challenges and sees new opportunities	Sees the big picture	Looks for partnerships and alliances	Creates an environment of mutual respect and trust	Communicates effectively	Works well with others in a team	Provides leadership	Plans, prioritizes and focuses on what is critical	Is committed to lifelong learning and personal career planning	Has personal and business skills and creates new opportunities	Recognizes the value of professional networking and solidarity	Flexible and positive in a time of continuing change
Expert knowledge of the content of information resources, including the ability to critically evaluate and filter them													
Specialised subject knowledge appropriate to the business of the organization or client													
Develops and manages convenient, accessible and cost-effective information services that are aligned with the strategic directions of the organization													
Provides excellent instruction and support for library and information users													
Assesses information needs and designs and markets value-added information services and products to meet identified needs													
Uses appropriate information technology to acquire, organise and disseminate information													
Uses appropriate business and management approaches to communicate the importance of information services to senior management													
Develops specialised information products for use inside or outside the organization or by individual clients													
Evaluates the outcome of information use and conducts research related to the solution of information management problems													
Continually improves information services in response to changing needs													
Is an effective member of the senior management team and a consultant to the organization on information issues													

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APPENDIX II

MATCHING PROFESSIONAL LIBRARIAN COMPETENCIES WITH BUSINESS COMPETENCIES

Professional Competencies / Business Competencies	Strategic Positioning	Packaging	Promoting	Persuading	Performing
Expert knowledge of the content of information resources, including the ability to critically evaluate and filter them					
Specialised subject knowledge appropriate to the business of the organization or client					
Develops and manages convenient, accessible and cost-effective information services that are aligned with the strategic directions of the organization					
Provides excellent instruction and support for library and information users					
Assesses information needs and designs and markets value-added information services and products to meet identified needs					
Uses appropriate information technology to acquire, organize and disseminate information					
Uses appropriate business and management approaches to communicate the importance of information services to senior management					
Develops specialised information products for use inside or outside the organization or by individual clients					
Evaluates the outcome of information use and conducts research related to the solution of information management problems					
Continually improves information services in response to changing needs					
Is an effective member of the senior management team and a consultant to the organization on information issues					

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APPENDIX III

MATCHING THE COMPONENTS OF A LIBRARIAN COMPETENCY WITH THE BUSINESS COMPETENCIES

#1 Expert knowledge of the content of information resources, including the ability to critically evaluate and filter them		Positioning	Packaging	Promoting	Persuading	Performing
Knowledge	-products and their content					
	-client needs and information use behaviours					
	-organizational objectives					
	-technical infrastructure					
Skills	-negotiation (with clients and vendors)					
	-information extraction					
	-product evaluation					
	-client needs evaluation					
	-communication					
Understandings	-a diverse range of products can deliver similar information					
	-client needs and information use behaviours rarely remain static					
	-product evaluation can assist prioritization for delivery and budgetary purposes					
	-price and delivery and access options are part of the evaluation process					
Attitudes	-flexibility					
	-quality is subjective and that our views should often not be forced onto the information users					
	-our evaluation and filtering can make a significant contribution to people's work					
	-when dealing with vendors *we* are the customers and that when dealing with clients *they* are the customers					

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APPENDIX IV

MATCHING THE COMPONENTS OF A LIBRARIAN COMPETENCY WITH THE COMPONENTS OF A BUSINESS COMPETENCY

#1 Expert knowledge of the content of information resources, including the ability to critically evaluate and filter them		Positioning						
		Knowledge				Skills		
		Organizational	Client	Industry	Technological	Communication	Negotiation	Political
Knowledge	-products and their content							
	-client needs and information use behaviours							
	-organizational objectives							
	-technical infrastructure							
Skills	-negotiation (with clients and vendors)							
	-information extraction							
	-product evaluation							
	-client needs evaluation							
	-communication							
Understandings	-many products deliver similar information							
	-client needs and information use behaviours rarely remain static							
	-product evaluation can facilitate prioritization for delivery and budgetary purposes							
	-price and delivery and access options are part of the evaluation process							
Attitudes	-flexibility							
	-quality is subjective our views should often not be forced onto the information users							
	-our evaluation and filtering can make a significant contribution to people's work and the organization's success							
	-when dealing with vendors *we* are the customers and that when dealing with clients *they* are the customers							

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